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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3405

March 2, 2005

The Honorable Alberto R. Gonzales  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Gonzales:

As you assume the duties of your new office, I call on you to expedite the Justice Department's efforts to improve its criminal debt collection.

A recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, prepared at my request, revealed continuing problems with the Justice Department's criminal debt collection efforts. The report found that only about 7 percent of the court-ordered restitution had been collected in selected cases.

Moreover, last March, in a related report, the GAO found that the amount of uncollected criminal debt had nearly doubled from \$13 billion to \$25 billion in just three years – and over the same period, the percentage of debts collected by the Justice Department had plummeted.

Inexplicably, the Justice Department has not been aggressively pursuing a major recommendation made by the GAO in 2001 to establish a joint criminal debt collection task force, which GAO says would help boost the unacceptably low criminal debt collection rate.

To compel the Department to take action, I got a provision added to the omnibus spending bill signed into law last December directing the Attorney General to establish a joint task force, and develop a strategic plan for enhancing criminal debt collection. According to the GAO, the Department is now "in the process" of organizing the task force.

While the Department seems to be taking its first steps to improve criminal debt collection, this is only happening because Congress has dragged the Department along. I hope that in your new capacity, you will motivate the Department to effectively ramp up its criminal debt collection and put an end to the bureaucratic foot dragging. Victims of crime – and taxpayers – deserve no less.

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I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Byron", is positioned above the printed name.

Byron L. Dorgan  
U.S. Senator

BLD:ach